

# Psychoanalysis of Select Themes in *Veronica Decides to Die* by Paulo Coelho

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## ABSTRACT

*Modern history holds a large number of intellectually productive writers to its list. With versatile noetic writings that howler the composite and distinguished themes like Elements of psychological depression, feminism and self realization, Paulo Coelho, irrefutably transcends the list. With his engaging authorship, the author Paulo Coelho helps the readers to light upon the position of feminism, to determine and reflect on one's freedom and the urge to act upon depression in the modern-day society. This article discusses the select themes like self-realization, psychological depression and feminism in the novel.*

**KEY WORDS:** *psychological depression, feminism, self-realization, existentialistic crisis, domination, concern.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The novel revolves around Veronica, the protagonist from the novel 'Veronika Decides to Die'. This conjuring novel by Paulo Coelho explicates the life of twenty-four-year aged Veronika, who leads a vacuous life with existentialistic crisis, in spite of the fact that she is bestowed with everything that a twenty-four-year could hope for. She makes a hazardous decision to kill herself by consuming a smattering amount of sleeping drugs. Coelho has facilitated the readers to reflect upon their own self and perceive attention to their mental health achieving the result of emancipation and self-fulfilment. The author, Paulo Coelho, has thrown light on the phylogeny of feminism and their Utopian emotions using symbolism of the world and asylum through his poetic style (Putnam). The author has made a sound impression by stating materialistic comfort is no way guarantees a person's mental well-being. In parallel, the author also makes a distinct note on mental health and positivity,

presenting example of the lead character in the novel who was subjected to existential crisis finally rages with strong emotion to go after her passion.

The protagonist Veronica becomes fully aware that life is not a mere travel but a journey of exploration and self-realization. Involving very simpleton words in the novel, the author has specified feminism, conflated religious and philosophical ideas eventually succeeding in all areas. Moreover, this piece of work is a sound representation of the author's desires. The author's rebellious teenage is very vivid in his writing. All through his childhood Coelho had been extensively creative and aspired to be a writer. However, his parents were worried of their son's attitude and slant which made them send him to a mental asylum. As a child he had to undergo so many therapies and electroconvulsive therapy (ECT); 'He brings out his experience through the character of Eduard in the book' (Vijay; Coelho). Nonetheless, many theories of feminism have been discussed in the book. Numerous symbols have been aptly employed throughout the novel that bespeaks feminist theories.

Society has couched certain rules and regulations by which women are expected to comport. Women have been caged in the patriarch world, with direction on how one is supposed to behave. If any individual stands out and voices her own opinion, they are seen under the prism of psychoanalytical model. Regardless of all these, the novel 'Veronica decides to die' breaks the shackles of the society and comprehends how acceptance of one's own and self realization can lead to psychological enlightenment. The paper aims in critically analyzing the theme of self-realization, feminism and depression in the novel 'veronica decides to die' by Paulo Coelho.

## **2. ELEMENT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL DEPRESSION**

Some of the most common symptom of depression is associated with existential crisis, weakness in terms of both mental and physical state and dejected mood and lifestyle. In such case, the individual suffers an intense infliction to carry on with his day to day social life or profession. Depression can cast down a person's state of being in highly drastic measures. It creates gloom and dismay in over all life of the person; right from their domestic, social and professional life (Marcus et al.). The protagonist of the novel 'Veronica' is an illustration of depressed individual. She finds her life very prosaic and all the materialistic comfort or the affection of her family doesn't excite her. The atmosphere of gloominess and melancholy engulfs her and she doesn't find any interest in her job as librarian. 'Veronika is what is described is a round character. Round characters are life like and they grow and change as a real person in course of life (Vidhya and Arjunan)'. The characterization of Veronica is composite in nature that provokes the readers to consider there is more than one aspect to every situation in life. The author has done brilliant characterization of veronica and vividly depicts the depressed emotions and feelings through the character. The author creates a lively demonstration of struggles and pain that a depressed individual has to go through in everyday life with subtle yet substantial situations. The unfirm mental state and the bemusement of the character is sound in the line "And she was shocked

by how quickly she could change her mind, since only moments before she had thought exactly the opposite”(Coelho, p.6).

Fear dreads in her brimming with so many disconfirming thoughts. She anticipates that her life would grow more inferior as she gets older. She images her ripened days of life where all her darkest fears surround her leaving her with only complaints and forlornness. Veronica seriously considers that suffering and pain is proportional to ageing. Paulo Coelho stands out in characterization of Veronica and builds tension and inflection to the readers by reflecting Veronica's pessimistic sense of inadequacy and despondence. “It was time to feel proud of herself, to recognise that she had been able to do this, that she had finally had the courage and was leaving this life: what joy! Also she was doing it as she had always dreamed she would-by taking sleeping pills, which leave no mark” (Coelho, p.2).

Make no mistake about people who leap from burning windows. Their terror of falling from a great height is still just as great as it would be for you or me standing speculatively at the same window just checking out the view; i.e. the fear of falling remains a constant. The variable here is the other terror, the fire's flames: when the flames get close enough, falling to death becomes the slightly less terrible of two terrors (Wallace, David)

The characterization of the protagonist Veronica is so intense, that it makes the reader to be in oneness with the character's emotions. Veronica is depicted to undergo emotional sufferings of nervousness, anxiety, temperament, uselessness. With each passing day Veronica slips into a dominion of complete darkness. The absence of enthusiasm and positivity is an ensured communication of depression. The prolonged downcast in emotions and desperate mental image of life necessitates Veronica to put an end to her life on her own. The author Paulo Coelho has made a strong remark on how a person's upbringing, surroundings in which he had to adjust from childhood and naturally the decisions he makes in life has a huge part in, a person's mental health.

Each human being is unique, each with their own qualities, instincts, forms of pleasure, and desire for adventure. However, society always imposes on us a collective way of behaving, and people never stop to wonder why they should behave like that. (Coelho, Paulo)

One of the Substantial characters in the novel 'Veronica Decides to Die' is Dr.Igor. Dr.Igor formulates that even factors like climatic condition can have a significant consequence on a patient's mental welfare. Throughout the novel, many characters are rendered to have mental sufferings. One such character is Zedka, who suffers from acute psychological depression. She feels that it is a great deception when the society seems to be happy and comfortable with life. Even the very act of children playing appears unfair to her. She associates her mood with the climatic conditions. Zelda feels the rough and cold weather keeps her emotions and mood at ease.

Even Eduard, is one another interesting character that has a huge significance in the novel. Though Veronica was mystified by his presence in the initial stages, she was completely amazed by his ability to effortlessly play piano despite his depressed mood. Veronica later comes to know that Eduard is a victim of the society's constraint and his parent's demand and pressure. His burning desire to be an artist eventually gets aborted when his parents force him to be a scholar leaving behind all his lunatic wish of becoming an artist. "If you really love us, do as I ask. If you don't love us, then carry on as you are now." However, in the later stages, he supports Veronica in the unconscious process of self-realization.

### 3. ELEMENT OF FEMINISM

Throughout history, we see the female characters in the literature portrayed as an epitome of perfection and sainthood. They have been conditioned to act more feminine and inferior to men. Nevertheless, with the evolution of time, women characters in literature have been imposed with manlike attributes to empower them. For instance, even the greatest writer in English, Shakespeare presented women in disguise of male characters. Also Britomart, one of the most complex of female characters in Spenser's novel, despite the description of being so beautiful and chaste was depicted to fit out as knight to salvage lives (Vyomakesisri). Times change and so does art. Paulo Coelho breaks these stereotypes in his novels. Peculiarly, Paulo Coelho exhibits the female protagonist as modernistic and strong willed. Unconventionality and independence in thoughts are also the feministic components that are reflected in this novel. The female protagonist effortlessly gleams in the novel and doesn't necessitate any transvestism or manlike attributes. However, Paulo Coelho has brought the contrasting features between the two sexes to discern their characters and indicate how the feminism has overture.

The author enounces the act of depleting sleeping pills as a feminine sign in the lines "Shooting, jumping off a high building, hanging, none of these options suited her feminine nature. Women, when they kill themselves, choose far more romantic methods-like slashing their wrists or taking an overdose of sleeping pills" (Coelho, p.6). He describes the act of slashing the wrists or too much dosing of pills to be more amatory way of killing one. This draws a clean conflict between masculine and feministic approach. Through the characters of the novel and wonderful penning, the author has made a fundamental approach to feminism. Veronica outshines as a bold personality and she doesn't imitate to stand out. Paulo Coelho has made efforts to limelight how the feministic approach can be felt and empathised. "Veronika felt sorry for the woman telling the story, for she seemed to be doing so in an attempt to understand her aunt's death. In a world where everyone struggles to survive whatever the cost, how could one judge those people who decide to die?" (Coelho, p.32).

From the following lines it is evident that all the female personas in the novel are empathetic and could develop a sound rapport. The characters make an attempt to portion out their emotions and find a console and security. Undoubtedly, the women in the writings of Paulo Coelho display feministic and liberal traits. These modern liberalism and their lucidity

in their thoughts are prominent in the lines, “We're allowed to make a lot of mistakes in our lives, except the mistake that destroy us” (Coelho, p.23).

The female characters in the novel are deep, unforgettable and exceptional. Parallely, the element of feminism also travels in the novel that facilitates Veronica to step out from her confined thoughts and undergo the marvels of life. Veronica breaks the shackle and becomes a wild soul in pursuit of untamed yet meaningful life. Undeniably, the author has also created a greater impact by defining significance of feminism in contemporary world.

The brilliance of the author is appreciable as he has done a remarkable influence in getting the readers to understand the values of his contents, just through the exchange of ideas between the characters in his novels. Many wise remarks have been made throughout the novel .Many striking impacts have been made to actualise ‘Love triumphs Wisdom and judgement’ and ‘ Feminine judgement is over good and bad.’ The author, Paulo Coelho strongly affirms the component of feminism in numerous ways. He proposes women to act on their will and never to back down by the opinion of others. (Coelho, 480-482).

The author has done anappreciable speculation in examining Villette to a patriarchal society. The book draws a comparison between the women trapped in a patriarchal society to that of inmates confined in Villette. Furthermore, Coelho, has also been successful in comparing Villette to patriarchal society. To the climax, we see the two main characters of the novel Zedka and Mari pull out from the asylum. They slowly relieve themselves from mental agony that has been imposed on them by the society with its rules and dominance. The book compares patients of mental institutes to women oppressed in such society. With the developments of characters, Mari and Zedka, who decide to get out of the Villette. They storm out with heightened confidence and revived and rejuvenated mindset to lead a completely different life. This remind of the Feminist Utopian dream to free them self from the social effrontery that has been imposed on them.

#### **4. ELEMENT OF SELF-REALIZATION**

Self -realization is one of the very important and striking themes of the novel. The author, Paulo Coelho has made an attempt to preach and illuminate readers mentally and psychologically. The lead character of the novel, Veronica who is subjected to depression and decides to end her life turns out to be the symbolism of life and its challenges. Rather than thrusting the readers with loaded thoughts, the author has brilliantly inseminated the ideas through gripping characters like Zedka, Veronica and Mary. Through this stunning novel, the author has testified that, with self- realization, one can lead a positive and elucidated life. There was an instance in the novel where Mari helps Veronica to understand her receptiveness to sexuality. This helps her to look and analyse her own self. Veronica reflects her own thoughts and life to discover her inner desires. Furthermore, she follows her heart and goes seeking for love of her life which she believes has been a hidden desire leaving her incomplete all along (Coelho, p.135).

Her stay in asylum also invokes her thirst to be a winner. She vivifies her warmth and affection for life. She resurrects back to life by pursuing little things that make her feel blissful, to start with she gets back to play piano. She had always aspired to be one of the finest musicians but let go of it as her mother disapproved of such fancy ideas. The author, Paulo Coelho symbolizes the act of rekindling to pursue her passion as Symbol of realization and self-assurance. She steps out of all the shackles of self doubt and the fear of being judged by the society. She decides to be a happy-go-lucky person and to go after the inclination of her hearts want.

In the last days of her life, she had finally realized her grand dream: to play with heart and soul, for as long as she wanted and whenever the mood took her. It didn't matter to her that her only audience was a young schizophrenic; he seemed to understand the music, and that was what mattered (Coelho, p.113).

The moods and interactions of Veronica all through her life have taught her a thing of great significance- The need for self-realization. She understands that the worldly life is short lived and there is no point in confining oneself of all desires; behave in a way that the society expects you to rather than following your heart. She accepts the way she is and doesn't look for an acknowledgement. She admits that it is ok to be different. She makes sense that it is absolutely fine to express what she feels and doesn't have to feel bothered about what opinion people might carry about her. This simple understanding clears her mind and gives her the confidence to explore her unsatisfied needs. It dawns on her that the mere sentiment to keep satisfying others and lack of attention to own self has stimulated her to self-annihilate. Paulo Coelho further delineates the protagonist's self-realization journey as, stirring up the unconscious mind from the subjugation burdened by the society and other beings. The author takes the reader on a trip, enlightening them; at the end life is a mere fantasy and one should adopt it and lead a fulfilling aliveness following the desires of heart.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This paper has analysed various themes like feminism, psychological aspects and the need for self-realization in the novel Veronica decides to die. Initially, the protagonist Veronica confronts an asymmetry in her death instincts and life. She finds it hard to accept the way of life she leads. She finds the whole life existentialistic and caught in a boring loop of events. These suppressed struggles, finally pushes her to a stage of self-annihilation. She exalts death to be poetical, and believes it's the only way to escape such monotonous existentialistic life. Feminism is another striking theme of the novel. The author subtly compares Villette to that of oppressed women and the hothead and asylum constitutes to the male dominant society. Further the prison stands as a symbol of Feminist's Utopian dreams. The theme of self realization is seen through the novel with gradual realization of Veronica about the fantasy of life and her recuperation from depression. She frees herself from the self-inflicted cage with Sexual desire and reliance as powerful keys. Towards the end she walks out with confidence and a desire to expend a life like never before.

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